

## MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

### 1.—A NOTE ON THE HABITS OF PIKAS OR MOUSE-HARES.

The pikas are said to be found in Kabul<sup>1</sup>, but the writer has had little chance to find them in the city. They are, however, found in abundance at Surchashma (a small village about sixty miles south-west of Kabul) and at the Unai Pass, both places being situated at the source of the Kabul river. The Unai hills are about eleven hundred feet high, and one of their valleys, situated two miles of Surchashma, called Durra-a-bagha, is probably the central habitation of pikas in this area.

The pika of Surchashma belongs to the species *Ochotona rufescens* (Gray) and are locally known as *Mush-a-lundae* (tail-less rats) or *Khaltā-mush* (sac-like rats). They are gregarious and eagerly eat the fresh plants of wheat and lucerne and so prove a menace to cultivation. The weasel is said to capture and devour them and hence is often kept by the cultivators. They live in crevices of loose stones in the low bounding walls of cultivated land, formed in terraces on the lower slopes of the hills. These slow moving small animals come out early in the morning and evening and children capture them from their holes by taking hold of their ears. Thirty pikas were caught by the writer last year, but only one, the strongest and healthiest, was able to endure captivity for forty days. The natural diet is evidently the fresh leaves of wheat and lucerne, but they were given wheat grains and mostly carrots. In the meantime the colour of the fur faded, i.e., turned into pale brown, which may, probably, be due to diet or their being kept in shade.

FACULTY OF MEDICINE,  
KABUL,  
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S. A. AKHTAR.

[Desert Gerbilles (*Meriones hurrianæ*) from the Sind Desert became perceptibly darker after 6-8 months captivity in Bombay. Diet or light and climatic change may have been the cause.—EDS.]

### 2.—THE HIMALAYAN TAHR (*HEMITRAGUS JEMLAHICUS* H. SIM.) IN SIKKIM.

Captain Wrenicke's very interesting note on the Tahr in Sikkim draws attention to a little known fact of distribution. The existence of Tahr in Sikkim has been known for many years. In the *Fauna of British India*, Mammalia, Blanford states that this animal occurs 'throughout the Himalayas from the Pir Panjal to Sikkim' and adds '(I have skins from the latter, obtained by Mr. Mandelli).' A skull and, I think, a skin is preserved in the Natural History Museum at Darjeeling.

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<sup>1</sup> *Jour. Bomb. Nat. Hist. Soc.*, Vol. xxvi, 4. p. 937.

Just before the war a German named Schaeffer was travelling in Tibet and Sikkim. He obtained specimens of Tahr which were named *schaefferi* by a German zoologist. Owing to the war, the description of this, as a new species (or sub-species?), is not obtainable in this country.

In the Sikkim shooting licence, the Tahr was deliberately omitted from the list of game which might be shot, as it was not intended to allow any to be killed on a normal shooting trip. The licence did not include a complete list of game animals to be found in Sikkim.

HILL HOUSE, NORTHPREPPS,  
CROMER, NORFOLK, ENGLAND,  
November 29, 1943.

F. M. BAILEY,  
Lt.-Col.

### 3.—CANINE TEETH IN CHITAL (*AXIS AXIS*) STAGS.

On page 169 of the Society's *Journal* for December, 1943 (vol. xliv, No. 2), Pocock states that in Axis deer, generally known as the chital in India and as the spotted deer in Ceylon, the upper canine teeth are typically absent—in both sexes.

Pocock quotes Lydekker as saying, on unstated authority, that the canine teeth are generally absent in Axis, a contention which was repeated or copied by Phillips. Pocock found that the canine teeth were 'entirely absent' in all the numerous skulls he examined at the British Museum.

I have not got my reference—nor Game Book with me, but I wonder if your readers who have shot the lovely Axis stag will agree with these rather general statements.

Many times I have been surprised to find that big game hunters had never heard of these well-known teeth in stags, the *haken* as German and Austrian stalkers call them—much prized trophies when mounted acorn-fashion in badges and brooches.

I have pointed out these rudimentary teeth in Axis stags more than once to friends in the field, and somewhere in my collections there must be a few sets but it is not possible to post them to you at the moment.

No doubt these teeth, as found in Axis, can only be called rudimentary, they are not solid and fully developed as in the stags of Europe. As a rule they are just under the skin of the upper gums and have not broken through. In a few cases they are visible as small white spots.

They can be lifted out quite easily and rather resemble the thin broken shell of a tiny egg. It is not surprising that the skulls in the British Museum should not show any of these teeth as they are lost at once when the flesh has rotted or the skull has been boiled and cleaned. There is no socket. The skull of the European stag does not show these teeth, although the animal grows fully developed and solid ones.

Strange to say many trackers—as a rule keen observers—rarely know about this and are interested when shown them.